ATPM

About This Particular Macintosh: About the **personal** computing experience.™

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Welcome

by Robert Paul Leitao, rleitao@atpm.com

Welcome to the February issue of *About This Particular Macintosh!* Due to the snow emergencies in Michael Tsai's New Hampshire, the ATPM virtual world headquarters has been temporarily moved to sunny Santa Clarita, California. It's actually good to have things running on Cupertino Time. Based on the company's December quarter results, Apple's world headquarters has become the global epicenter of the technology industry's success.

The Digital Good Life

Santa Clarita's slogan is "Where the Good Life Takes You." In choosing a temporary locale, we had to bypass the hometown of ATPM managing editor Chris Turner. Following Mr. Turner's Twitter activity we understand he's busy in the great state of Texas pursuing where the digital good life takes him. It's not that Chris isn't capable of overseeing our virtual operations while on the go. The issue is wherever he travels with his Apple gear it tends to attract a crowd. Chris isn't one to pursue public attention. It's the dandy devices he carries that build a crowd. Always distracted by the throngs of followers seeking to admire his favorite portable devices, it's challenging for him to sit anywhere and make command decisions. We'll move back to New Hampshire next month after Michael digs through the snow and Chris finds a place to sit quietly as more people buy Apple products of their own.

At ATPM we celebrate the "personal computing experience" and where the digital good life might take you. We thank you for joining us this month and every month as we explore the best uses of Apple's popular personal technology products.

Enhance The Digital Good Life, Reap The Profit Rewards

If there's a lesson in Apple's continuing success it's that high quality products that enhance the digital good life bring about fiscal rewards. For the three-month period ended in December, Apple reported record revenue of $26.741 billion dollars and record earnings of $6.43 per share. Thanks in large part to the success of the iPad, Apple's revenue in the December quarter was 2.25 times the revenue of two years before. In the December quarter, over 56% of revenue was derived from two products—the iPhone and the iPad—that did not exist in the marketplace four years before. It's obvious our managing editor isn't the only one buying the latest Apple products.

The Mac Is Back, But Few Take Notice

Last fiscal year, Apple sold 13.662 million Macs. This fiscal year the number of Macs sold may reach 17 million units. It's easy for the Mac's success to be overshadowed by the more than 160 million iOS-based devices that have been sold in less than four years. There's no doubt now the PC-centric era is over. Today there's less need for the traditional PC as consumers the world over migrate to handheld devices for communication, entertainment,

and commerce. This makes the Mac's resurgence even more remarkable. In the recent conference call with analysts, the company's management mentioned what many us already know. There's a halo effect with Apple products. One Apple product tends to entice the consumer to buy other Apple products. The Mac is back and unit sales are bigger than ever. In the December quarter, the new MacBook Air and the popular MacBook Pros were standout products that pushed Mac sales higher by 23% year-over-year.

Celebrating the Personal Computing Experience

Whether you're snow bound in New Hampshire, on the go in Texas, or situated here in sunny Southern California, computing products in many shapes and sizes fit our needs and our circumstances. Much has changed over the past 16 years, and the editors of ATPM continue to chronicle the personal computing experience one month at a time. Please join us each month here at ATPM and consider following our managing editor via of Twitter as he pursues the digital good life each day of the month at a time. On Twitter he calls himself retrophisch. We don't know quite how to pronounce that but it looks kind of cool in print.

ATPM Wants You!

The editorial staff of ATPM is comprised of talented writers who started their relationship with our publication as readers of our monthly issues. When we say that we "celebrate the personal computing experience," we mean it. If you've ever had the urge to share your personal computing experiences with a large and influential readership, please contact us at editor@atpm.com.

Please join us each month of the new year for our unique blend of views, news, and product reviews.

Our February issue includes:

Bloggable

A monthly summary of Wes Meltzer's blogosphere news, originating from his Pinboard feed. This month: Between a Rock and Verizon, other Mobileverse news, and The Future of the Internet Is In Your Hands.

MacMuser: Here We Go Again

Mark Tennent laments how technology of this generation ceases to function so quickly, noting that his 16-year-old Apple LaserWriter 8500 is, more or less, still running strong.

Next Actions: GTD for iOS/iPad

Ed Eubanks Jr. discusses how iOS devices play into the future of Mac task management.

How To: Making the Most of What's Already on Your Mac

In the next installment of this new series, Sylvester Roque covers the features that control or enhance what you see and hear in Mac OS X.

Desktop Pictures: Astronomy

This month features an editor-selected collection of images originally featured in the NASA Astronomy Picture of the Day collection.

Out at Five

Matt Johnson's new series, *Out at Five,* looks at the workplace and its boundaries from all angles, revolving around many of the same characters from his former series, *Cortland.*

Review: NeatReceipts and NeatWorks

Wes Meltzer finds a very nice receipt scanner that ships with mediocre software.

Review: Raptor-S16 iPhone Stand

A big gooseneck holder/stand for your iPhone or similar device.

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Simplenote and Notational Velocity

Were we twins, separated at birth? Your article reflects all my feelings about notes.

I've been through OneNote (when I was forced to be on Windows), Journler, MacJournal, Personal Brain, Circus Ponies Notebook, Curio, Evernote, and even Tinderbox. Loved them all for about two years apiece. (Actually, Circus Ponies Notebook and Curio lasted only as long as a second crash that lost data. Totally unacceptable, much as I loved their graphical and calendar features.)

But with iPhone and iPad, I wanted something more, and took me a while to realize what I really need:

- Fast searchability

- Lots of drag-n-drop support (Web pages, graphics, e-mail)

- Wikiness—i.e., note-note linking

- Multi-platform—Mac, iPhone, iPad

Right now, I am delighted with VoodooPad. Have been on it since October. iPad version just came out; while formatting is limited by iOS, it pretty much does the trick. It syncs faithfully by way of .Mac or a WebDAV (including DropBox, it seems).

VoodooPad automatically recognizes Address Book entries and links them.

I still use Evernote for screen caps, maybe out of habit. And of course Evernote is also Windows- and Web-accessible, while VoodooPad is not.

Gus Mueller of VoodooPad is wonderfully accessible to his customers; that's a plus, too.

I too would love to hear from other note freaks.

—*Joel Orr*

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Another way to use Notational Velocity is by telling it to store notes as plain text files in a Dropbox folder and using a Dropbox-aware text editor on other platforms. (I use PlainText on iOS and Epistle on Android.) That way you'll have backups of your notes everywhere you have a computer linked to Dropbox.

However, given Dropbox runs on Amazon and Simplenote on Google's infrastructures, I think you'll be in pretty good shape either way.

—Nicholas Riley

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Like Nicholas I use PlainText (on the iPad it looks great and works really well). The sync via Dropbox is great, and I use TextEdit (obviously in plain text format and saving to the same folder on Dropbox) on the Mac.

I'd be very happy if PlainText was available on the Mac!

—Graham Hind

OmniFocus, TaskPaper, and Things

Great article. I've used all three and prefer TaskPaper over the other two. As stated, the strengths of OmniFocus and Things are also their weakness. It just takes too long to get information in/out of them. TaskPaper is flexible and fast!

In addition, TaskPaper now has both iPhone and iPad apps with full synchronization between the three using SimpleText. I believe that SimpleText will be replaced with DropBox for syncing in a future release.

—Chip

Legacy Outliners

Once, a very long time ago, I used Arrange/WebArranger and liked it very much. I would like to have that functionality very much now, but I haven't found it yet. CE Software has vanished, and so probably the code of WebArranger. Any ideas where, or who that maybe took over? Or who bought it or something?

I sent e-mail to CE Software some years ago and googled for it now and then…but to no avail.

—Leif Nilsson

> When I wrote these columns, I traced the code of all the abandoned applications. I forget the details of each product, but I am pretty sure that the code base for each is unavailable for different reasons.
> So a revival of any product would be a recreation.
> *—Ted Goranson*

We'd love to hear your thoughts about our publication. We always welcome your comments, criticisms, suggestions, and praise. Or, if you have an opinion or announcement about the Macintosh platform in general, that's OK too. Send your e-mail to editor@atpm.com. All mail becomes the property of ATPM and may be edited for publication.

Bloggable

by Wes Meltzer, wmeltzer@atpm.com

Between a Rock and Verizon

The iPhone finally comes to Verizon, after many years of speculation. Here's just a handful of the acres of commentary the move generated, and a few guides on what you can do if you're considering the move yourself.

Love Don't Come Easy for Apple and Verizon

You may have heard that Apple and Verizon finally have a deal on the iPhone. Or maybe you live under a rock…on Mars. In a *long* thread of links to come, Dan Moren looks back at the long courtship between Apple and Verizon. Imagine what could've been.

How Verizon Can Learn From AT&T, Survive the iPhone Onslaught

Stephen Lawson of IDG offers some lessons from AT&T for Verizon to try to survive the iPhone onslaught.

What Do iPhone Users Gain, Lose from Verizon?

The guys at *Network World* take a good look at what the differences between AT&T's GSM network and Verizon's CDMA network mean for users. We all know about the lack of simultaneous voice and data, but it turns out that (a) its 3G coverage is much better, and (b) Verizon's network is slower for large files. So if you want consistent speed, choose Verizon, and if you want high peak speed, go with AT&T.

Turns out the Verizon iPhone 4 Won't Fit Many Current Cases

Apparently there are internal differences between the CDMA and GSM iPhone 4 model that result in certain cases designed for the AT&T iPhone not being compatible with Verizon's. The button placement on the left hand side is just slightly different. Ugh.

After Verizon, Could Sprint Be Next to Get the iPhone?

PC World speculates that after Verizon, Sprint might next get the iPhone. After all, both networks are CDMA networks—although, unlike GSM, there are often significant differences between CDMA implementations. That just leaves T-Mobile out in the cold. (I suspect T-Mobile wouldn't be willing to pay the hefty carrier subsidies for the iPhone.)

Verizon's Trade-in Offer Nothing to Write Home About

WalletPop takes a look at Verizon's trade-in offer on AT&T iPhones and concludes that it's probably not worth doing yet: AT&T's hefty early termination fee is actually more than the $280 Verizon is offering in trade-in credit; the break-even point is currently at buying your AT&T iPhone 4 in July. Plus, you'd have to pay AT&T in your own cash, since Verizon is just offering credit.

Popular Mechanics' Guide to Switching from AT&T to Verizon

Glenn Derene of *Popular Mechanics* (where I was once an intern) takes a good look at what you need to know about switching from AT&T to Verizon with your iPhone. He points out

that you can get a 3GS from AT&T for $49 right now, which is so astonishingly cheap it might be enough to dissuade a 3G user from switching at all.

Elsewhere in the Mobileverse...

Is Android "Inevitable"?

Counter Notions has a really interesting take on the "inevitability" of Android's victory over Apple in 2011. We've heard a lot of talk about this, but I haven't heard a better encapsulation of the difference between iOS and Android than this:

> As business models go, there are currently two dominant ones: either people like your product enough to purchase it or they don't care enough to buy it but will overlook its deficiencies if it's "free" in exchange for their personal browsing and purchasing info sold to advertisers.

In that regard, the only way Google makes money is by scale, because, like TV or billboards, they're not selling stuff, they're selling reach. So, the suggestion goes, Android is "inevitable" because its backers have to make it *seem* "inevitable." Without that air of inevitability, it might not succeed in its core mission of selling eyeballs.

Tim Bray's Year-End Review of the Mobile Marketplace

Tim Bray notes a few important trends in the mobile marketplace that he thinks will continue in 2011: low-end phones are going to be increasingly "smart"; Apple will make an inexpensive iPhone; and text input on mobile devices is still too hard for them to become primary work tools. (Counter-argument: iPhone Thumb still isn't as scary as Keyboard Wrist.) He also points out an observation I haven't heard about RIM and Nokia from anyone else: they're so far behind on building the developer ecosystem that they're at very real risk of falling out of the game.

The Future of the Internet Is in Your Hands

Andy Ihnatko on Competing With the iPad

Sun-Times über-columnist Andy Ihnatko takes a good look at what it takes to compete with Apple's iPad. The answer: 7″ devices need to do a few things exceptionally well, but a 10″ device can be more of a do-it-all device; past the $400 price point you have to have an answer to the "Why shouldn't I just buy an iPad?" question; and manufacturers can't afford to run stock Android, because then their hardware becomes increasingly commoditized. (Look who has all the power in the Microsoft-PC manufacturer relationship.)

Gizmodo on BlackBerry PlayBook: Weird But Great

Since we've been talking so much about tablets, here's an interesting review from *Gizmodo's* Matt Buchanan: the BlackBerry PlayBook (hello, CamelCase!) has to be tethered to a BlackBerry phone to get your e-mail and calendar, but it has some really interesting user interface decisions, like making the bezel a touch surface for gestures. Also of note, it

supports Adobe's AIR and HTML5 Web apps. I'm curious to see if the user interface elements are consistent between AIR and HTML5 apps…if they aren't, I predict a lot of Windows-style UI confusion.

Odds and Ends

What's the Right Way to Do Text Find and Replace?
Mark Aldritt, of Script Debugger and Affrus, has been experimenting with different ways to handle Find and Replace dialogs. For some reason, he felt the need to get rid of the old-fashioned modal dialog in exchange for a panel integrated into the main window. It's an interesting investigation, but I find the whole thing very jarring. These days I use TextMate mostly, but personally BBEdit's Find and Replace dialog is the gold standard. Why reinvent what's worked for basically 25 years of Mac history?

Windows 7 Up to 20% of Windows Install Base, While IE Falls to 58%
So this is interesting news. Analysis firm Net Applications says that, based on their analysis, Windows 7 now accounts for 20% of the Windows install base. That's already more than Vista, and it only took a year. Windows XP still accounts for 57%, which is remarkable. Also of interest: Internet Explorer is slowly trending downward toward 50% of market share, at 57% in December (vs. 59% in November). At the current pace, IE should be at 50% around the end of 2011. (If anything, the decline may be accelerating. Over the last 12 months IE has lost roughly 5%.) Breaking it down further, of those IE users, more than half are using IE8, and about a quarter using IE6 or IE7. Chrome, Firefox and Safari all gained slightly…looks to me like most of the drop in Microsoft's install base was thanks to Chrome, which went up three-quarters of a point to 10%.

Firefox Passes Internet Explorer in Europe
Following on the heels of yesterday's study from Net Applications about Windows 7 and IE use, StatCounter reports that, in Europe, more users now use Firefox than IE. Just like in that Net Applications study, what appears to be going on is that Chrome is further cannibalizing IE's statistics. Added to that is the fact that in Europe regulators have required a clearer presentation of choice over the default Web browser from Microsoft. In the US, IE is still on top, very likely thanks to the extremely confusing and mostly hidden way Windows ordinarily handles this behavior.

MacMuser

by Mark Tennent, http://www.tennent.co.uk

Here We Go Again

Welcome to 2011. I mean, you are welcome to 2011. For me, so far, it has meant expensive things breaking and needing replacement.

This started just before Christmas when the oven cooked its goose as its glass door fell apart. Then the washing machine decided to spit pieces of metal in its final spin before expiring in a final gurgle. Luckily, a new one ordered Christmas Eve arrived Bank Holiday Monday.

These appliances were at least bought at the same time, about five years ago. Both also had had a hard working life. The final insult came when our Canon Pixma 4600 printer packed up after less than two years of light duty. Despite all the efforts of cleaning and tweaking, it just sits blinking and saying it has Error B200—the cost of repair of which is more than the cost of a new printer.

Our Canon has been fed with only the finest OEM inks, bought at highly inflated prices, and we even have a set or two of cartridges in hand. Naturally, these don't fit any new printers. All of our previous inkjet printers died prematurely with blocked heads, but they had been given a diet of cheap compatible cartridges. For the Canon, we decided to use only the best, shoveling liquid more expensive than fine wine into it. Fat lot of good it did us. Instead of costing a few quid to keep it in compatible inks, it was more like £40 for a set of Canon branded refills.

Now, just as credit cards are feeling stretched, we must decide on a new printer. We've been through Epsons, Canons, and Lexmarks, so it looks like an HP, Kodak, or Samsung. None of these really appeal.

Our best printer, dating back to about 1995, is still going strong. It is an old Apple LaserWriter 8500, built in the days when things were made to last at least two years. The trouble nowadays is finding spares for it—especially toner—so we keep it for special occasions. The TCP/IP board seems to have given up the ghost, but it still has AppleTalk, which an ancient G3 iBook can connect to. This does mean that it takes an age to print anything, but then the printed page emerges on A3 stock with glorious PostScript output.

Next Actions
by Ed Eubanks Jr.

GTD for iOS/iPad

On the iPad and the Future of Mac Task Management

As developers turn their attention more toward development for the iPad and the iOS in general, I think many users are going to find the Mac-specific GTD applications to be less needful, because their task management needs are satisfied with some combination of a Web-based application and mobile synchronization, with maybe something like iCal synchronization in place.

My sense is that those users who are hard-core GTD devotees, and who make extensive use of the more robust tools, will use locally-installed applications like Things, OmniFocus, and maybe one or two others—especially those that expand well into these mobile spaces like iPhone and iPad. The rest of the locally-installed applications will need some sort of justification for their existence if they will sell at all.

Cases in Point

A case in point is Appigo's ToDo for iPad, which is a beautiful application that is very full-functioning. They also have an iPhone application, as well as a utility to sync ToDo with ToodleDo, a popular Web-based task-management tool (ToodleDo has its own iPhone and iPad applications, by the way, which are well-done in their own right), as well as with iCal's task list. I could see doing daily reviews in this on an iPad, weekly reviews in ToodleDo's Web interface, and ongoing tracking and check-off of tasks through the mobile apps and iCal.

OmniFocus is another great example of full-scale integration. Long one of the "standards" for the Mac, the Omni Group was quick to release their iPhone companion application as well, which has only gotten better as it has matured. The release of the iPad application, though, took OmniFocus GTD management to a new level: I find OmniFocus for iPad to be a preferable interface to either of the others for everything except bulk task and project planning and entry (the desktop version still prevails for that).

Things has also succeeded in bridging the two platform/three device gap, with popular offerings for the Mac, iPhone, and iPad. Others have seen less proliferation and success, while some are still wrestling with how to take their concept across to other platforms. Last fall, Jesse Grosjean, developer of TaskPaper, freely admitted to me that this has been an obstacle for him: while TaskPaper for iOS is available with compatibility for iPhone and iPad, he hasn't determined how the iPad version might serve the TaskPaper ecosystem uniquely (which is not to say that the iOS version is not useful; Jesse has done a good

job with the iOS companion app). I suspect that his struggle is not uncommon among developers of the more straightforward, somewhat-barebones solutions.

Not a Problem

While I understand this "struggle" and a desire to see discrete functions for each device, I'm not sure it is a true problem. Indeed, I think the simplicity that Jesse has employed with TaskPaper is one of the appealing aspects of it: people who simply don't need or want the depth and advanced power (and attendant complexity) of OmniFocus or even Things will find TaskPaper, and others similar to it, a welcome alternative.

Thus, the iPad presence doesn't need to serve a separate function. The utility of OmniFocus's distinction of features and, to some degree, prescribed function of the iPad version is laudable and surely appreciated by most users, but a TaskPaper user might actually find that sort of distinction tedious or even annoying.

On the other hand, everyone will agree that making TaskPaper universally-compatible on iOS devices (and not just another "2×" iPhone application on the iPad) is much appreciated. If there are no distinctive features, why not? (TaskPaper isn't unique here; I've noticed a couple of others doing this as well.)

Here We Go Again?

On the other hand, one problem with GTD on iOS, and especially on the iPad, is that round two of the long list of application makers has come. Just as there were hordes of developers rushing to take advantage of the GTD fever a few years ago with task management applications for the Web and Mac OS (thus the lengthy list that follows the body of this column), it seems there are many dozens of iOS apps for task management, many of them aimed squarely at the GTD market.

What's troublesome about this is two-fold: first, many of these are apps are only for the device they are installed on, leaving the user stranded for further function and input. Unless there is some sort of integration beyond the iPhone and/or iPad (such as I noted above with Appigo's ToDo, or some other effort), many users will find even the most appealing of these apps quite limited. Who can afford to create your entire task list by thumbs on an iPhone? Some users won't have a problem with this, but many (most?) will *want* easier input options and further accessibility to their lists, even if they don't need them. Let's face it: we've largely grown accustomed to having stuff like task lists at our fingertips wherever we are (Yay, cloud!).

Second, and perhaps more frustrating, is the status of software that is caught somewhere between vaporware and dead applications. I'll coin a new term here: gossamerware. We've seen this too often in GTD/task management software (and other categories, too): an application will rush onto the scene, be pronounced by some to be the one to topple the "big" targets, and then it languishes without updates or any further word about development. Sometimes the Web site will suddenly disappear; in other cases there will be a Web site that hasn't been updated for years.

Or perhaps there is clear evidence of ongoing development, but nothing ever seems to come of it—promised deadlines are repeatedly missed or pushed back, new OS upgrades are claimed to set everything back, and promised major upgrades (and/or versions for other platforms) that never come clearly get in the way of routine bug-fixes and other minor updates. Meanwhile, users are forced to wait for interminable periods for any progress in an application they have committed to, and they begin to wonder if they have chosen foolishly and should move to a different product. But the Web sites are so pretty! And the well-written copy claims that my wildest expectations and dreams will be exceeded in the coming weeks or months! It's so easy to forget that some version of that copy has been on the Web site for well over a year, in some cases.

Whether there is a monetary cost associated with committing to gossamerware, the cost of investing your time into learning the system, embracing it with your tasks and projects, and living with it on a daily basis is cost enough to make gossamerware frustrating. If one of the big ideas in GTD is to get your tasks into a *trusted system*, it's hard to trust these fleeting apps. And I fear that the proliferation of new options for iOS will go through the same cycle as many of the GTD apps have.

Where Do We Go With This?
I'm in a unique position to see how common gossamerware is, because I so regularly survey these Web sites in search of news about updates. I have to say, it seems pretty clear that the best path for a committed GTDer is to stick with one of the well-established packages, and choose one that either already offers options on the platform(s) you need or produces actual releases with enough regularity to trust that they will offer them soon.

Which makes me question the true value of the list below. When I started this project, my hope was to maintain a comprehensive, if not exhaustive, list of GTD-friendly applications for the Mac, and I think I've largely fulfilled that ambition. But a latent (and naïve) expectation within that hope was that the applications I surveyed would, by and large, be reliably maintained and updated. That clearly has not been the case, as regular readers will have noticed in my occasional (though too frequent, in my opinion) comments about the lack of updates and information about ongoing development. I have removed a few applications from the list over the years, but perhaps not enough.

That will change in future lists. Between now and the next edition of this list (date to be determined), I intend to cull it to what will certainly be a highly subjective and selective list, and one that, consequently, I hope will be more useful. One that you may safely choose from and know that it will indeed be a *trusted* system.

Some (many?) of you may be relieved at this change; I've received some feedback about the tedium of sorting through the apparently-defunct applications in order to find active ones. For me, this is a significant departure from what I once hoped this column to be. As I mentioned in my very first column, I was inspired by Ted Goranson's diligent—even vigilant—work in keeping up with outliners of many vintages (and as we learned in Ted's response to a question in the E-Mail section of this issue, Ted even went so far as to track the code of abandoned applications). I've written Next Actions as something of an homage

to [About This Particular Outliner](#), but it is time for me to depart from the footsteps of my predecessor and find my own path—at least with regard to this aspect of my column.

About the List

There are a lot of things happening on the iPad/iOS platform, and these probably merit a round-up or at least a look of some sort. For now, I have added notations about "iPad Presence" in the list below, and I've included the information that I have been able to gather. Feel free to comment with more, if you know about them.

I always welcome any feedback on my list or suggestions for additions. I don't always add every suggestion, but I'll look at them and evaluate whether they fit with my goals for this column. And given my plans for culling it a bit, I also welcome votes for which ones should be kept. Speak up now! As always, silence is assent.

Locally Installed GTD Applications

EasyTask Manager

Developer: Orionbelt.com
Current Version: 2.1
Price: $20
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes
Web-app Sync: Yes
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: App (free); Web app (free)
iPad Presence: App (free), Web app (free)
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4
Required Applications: None
Distinguishing Features: Windows version available; automatic advance of uncompleted due tasks to today.
News: None

Frictionless

Developer: Twin Forces
Current Version: 2.0d18
Price: Free, open-source
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5
Required Applications: None
Distinguishing Features: Quick-entry box; fuzzy repeated actions.
News: None

Ghost Action

Developer: Ghost Park Software
Current Version: 1.3.2
Price: $20
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: Sort of—a non-syncing application ($10)
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4 only
Required Applications: None

Distinguishing Features: .Mac syncing (without iCal running); PDA/iPod syncing; two-way iCal syncing.
News: None

iCog

Developer: HensPace
Current Version: 1.90
Price: Free
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Unknown
Required Applications: Python 2.4 or later
Distinguishing Features: Compatible with any OS running Python (including Windows); very simple text-only utility.
News: None

mGTD

Developer: Jeff Fisher
Current Version: 1.3
Price: Free
Development Status: Pre-final
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: None (Mori template)
Required Applications: Mori 1.6.11
Distinguishing Features: Expands Mori (digital notebook) functions to include GTD principles.
News: None

Midnight Inbox

Developer: Midnight Beep Softworks
Current Version: 1.4.4
Price: $35
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: App "coming soon"
iPad Presence: App ($15)
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4
Required Applications: None
Distinguishing Features: Action timer; quick-note and quick-action hot keys; Mail compatible; automatic data collection.
News: The Leopard-compatible version 2.0 of the Mac application is still "coming soon."

OmniFocus

Developer: Omni Group
Current Version: 1.8.2
Price: $80
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: App ($20)
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.8
Required Applications: None
Distinguishing Features: Mail compatible and Spotlight compatible; simple interface with powerful view features.
News: With version 1.8, much of the interface was simplified and streamlined. Omni also added "workflow improvements," and there are some substantial improvements. See the release notes.

Pluto menubar

Developer: MOApp Software Manufactory
Current Version: 5.1.1
Price: €16 (about $24)
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5
Required Applications: None
Distinguishing Features: This is a menu-bar application, but don't be fooled—it is a very fully featured GTD tool. There is a lot to see here, and you won't find any of the standard features you're looking for missing. Note the full-screen editing, searching, tags, contacts, and priorities.
News: None

Developer: Todd Vasquez
Current Version: 1.4.5
Price: $30
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4
Required Applications: None
Distinguishing Features: A very different approach using a set of AppleScript routines to impose organization and communication across a computer's entire file system; productivity scoring; help with files and tasks related to meetings; multiple language support.
News: None

TaskPaper

Developer: Hog Bay Software
Current Version: 2.2.1
Price: $19
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: App ($10)
iPad Presence: App ($10)
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5
Required Applications: None
Distinguishing Features: Simple text-based system; no-frills; intentionally designed as an alternative to more fully featured systems.
News: The iOS app is now compatible with both iPhone *and* iPad.

The Hit List

Developer: Potion Factory
Current Version: 0.9.3.25 (beta)
Price: $50 (pre-order)
Development Status: Beta
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: No
iPhone Presence: No (but indicated as "coming")
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5
Required Applications: None
Distinguishing Features: List view and "card" view; task timer; system-wide quick-entry; tabs allow good project management; AppleScript support; tags and prioritization of tasks.
News: Latest version extends the beta license, but still no substantial development on this application.

Things

Developer: Cultured Code
Current Version: 1.4.3
Price: $50
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: App ($10)
iPad Presence: App ($20)
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.11
Required Applications: None
Distinguishing Features: iCal sync; repeating tasks; Mail compatibility; tags; network and multi-computer operation; and import/export options.
News: Lots of improvements: sync speed, quick entry, and projects all received attention.

Thinking Rock

Developer: Avente Pty Ltd
Current Version: 3.1.2
Price: $40/first year; $10/annual subscription. (Note: version 2.x is also available for free.)
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4
Required Applications: None
Distinguishing Features: Cross-platform compatibility through Java; interactive collection and processing; can be run off of a flash drive.
News: None

What To Do

Developer: Objective Satisfaction
Current Version: 1.3.2
Price: $29
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.9
Required Applications: None
Distinguishing Features: Drag-and-drop intensive for easy reorganization; .Mac syncing for multiple computers; XML export.
News: None

Locally Installed General Task Managers

Anxiety

Developer: Tom Stoelwinder, Model Concept
Current Version: 1.0
Price: Free/Donationware
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5
Distinguishing Features: A menu-bar utility that gives a HUD-like interface to iCal tasks; sorts by calendar; Mac OS X 10.5 only.
News: None

Chandler

Developer: The Chandler Project
Current Version: 1.0.3
Price: Open Source
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: Yes
Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3
Distinguishing Features: A good integrated calendar makes this one a fairly full-orbed PIM.
News: None

Check Off

Developer: Second Gear
Current Version: 4.1.1
Price: $13
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5.2

Distinguishing Features: A menu-bar utility that manages basic task lists; syncs with iPods; a .Mac Backup QuickPick is provided.
News: None

Dejumble

Developer: Thinking Code Software, Inc.
Current Version: 2.0.1 (beta)
Price: $20
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)
iPhone Presence: App ($8)
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Unknown (would assume 10.4 or later, due to presence of Spotlight functions)
Distinguishing Features: A simple yet powerful menu bar–style task list manager, with tags, groups, notes, and a handful of other options.
News: None

Docket

Developer: Surprise Software
Current Version: 1.3
Price: $20
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.1
Distinguishing Features: A neat basic list-management application. A Windows version is also available.
News: None

DoIt

Developer: Jim McGowan
Current Version: 2.6
Price: Donationware
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: No
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4
Distinguishing Features: .Mac support and AppleScriptability. Also supports file attachments and categories for lists. Skins are available for customization.
News: None

FlexCal

Developer: flexgames
Current Version: 1.16
Price: Free/Donationware
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5
Distinguishing Features: A task and event creator for iCal; something of a collection bucket for GTD users.
News: A few additions and updates, as well as interface improvements.

Hot Plan

Developer: Intuiware
Current Version: 1.5.3

Price: $20
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: No
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5.8
Distinguishing Features: Tracks a substantial amount of information about a given task, including completion status, priority, and time remaining; supports tagging, color coding, and locking of tasks. Also allows collection of URLs and files.
News: No word on any version updates, because the entire Web site indicates upgrades are in progress.

iClock Pro

Developer: Script Software
Current Version: 1.1.1
Price: $20
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: No
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Unknown
Distinguishing Features: Offers a menu bar–based method of managing task lists; includes .Mac syncing.
News: Minor fixes and updates in this very incremental release.

Life Balance

Developer: Llamagraphics
Current Version: 5.3
Price: $65 ($80 bundled with Palm version)
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)
iPhone Presence: App ($20)
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4
Distinguishing Features: Gives meta-feedback about tasks: how much time are you spending in different areas of your life (i.e., work, family, hobbies, etc.), and are you keeping it balanced? Palm and Windows versions available.
News: None

NoteBook

Developer: Circus Ponies
Current Version: 3.0.3
Price: $50 (academic and family pack pricing available)
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: App
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.11
Distinguishing Features: Highly customizable system with project management built-in; also works well for heavy day-to-day GTD use.
News: None

Organized

Developer: iSlayer
Current Version: 1.11
Price: Donationware
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: No
iPhone Presence: None

iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5
Distinguishing Features: Dashboard widget with calendar events, tasks, notes, and world clock.
News: None

Qu-s

Developer: Urban Design Limited
Current Version: 1.53
Price: $17
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: No
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5
Distinguishing Features: Allows lists (and other things) to be created as an editable part of the desktop. Good for simple lists.
News: Bug fixes in the incremental release.

Stapler

Developer: The Blue Technologies Group
Current Version: 1.1
Price: €7.50 (about $10)
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4
Distinguishing Features: A combination notepad and to-do list manager, with creation date, notes, and a check box for completed items. Tasks can be color-coded based on a low-level preference set-up.

News: None

TaskMate

Developer: Ryan Conway
Current Version: 1.2.1
Price: Free
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: No
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5
Distinguishing Features: Ultra-simple task list: remaining tasks in a simple list; completed tasks in a drawer (which can be hidden). Tasks are just single-line descriptions with a check box. Could be right for the super-simplified life.
News: None

Today

Developer: Second Gear
Current Version: 2.5.1
Price: $22
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5
Distinguishing Features: A window interface for quick reference and entry to iCal events and tasks. Allows global shortcuts for viewing and creation of new tasks and events.
News: Bug fixes and minor feature improvements.

ToDo X

Developer: Omicron Software Systems, Inc.
Current Version: 2.3
Price: $15
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Import from iCal only
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: No
iPhone Presence: None
iPad Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.2
Distinguishing Features: Offers categories, priorities, and attached notes.
News: None

Browser and Web-based GTD Applications

30 Boxes

Price: Free
Description: Lean and fast, including a calendar, task list, and limited Gmail interaction. Also RSS and iCal feeds, SMS, and sharing. Nice interface, too.

43 Actions

Price: Free (donations get extra features)
Description: Specifically designed as an iPhone Web app, it's light and lean for EDGE network optimization. Submit inbox items via e-mail, Twitter (with donation), Jott (with donation), and the usual features.

GTDAgenda

Price: Free
Description: Another Web version of a GTD tool, with the standard features. Plus, addition of Goals, checklists for recurring tasks, schedule management, and an iCal-compatible calendar. A mobile version is also available.

GTDInbox

Price: Free

Description: A Firefox extension for GTD integration with Gmail. Prepackaged labels, a Review process, specialized searches within Gmail, quick-entry for tasks, and printable. Works well in conjunction with RememberTheMilk. Current version, 2.0.8.4, is open source; requires Firefox.

GTD-PHP

Price: Free

Description: A PHP solution designed to be locally installed. A simple tabbed interface for the capture and process stages; weekly review. Currently at version 0.8.

Neptune

Price: $10/year

Description: Includes a collection inbox and context or project task viewing panes, as well as inactive projects and tasks. Daily e-mail reminders of tasks; new tasks can be added by e-mail; data export.

Next Action

Price: Free

Description: Uses Google Gears and Firefox; has a lean, basic interface with multiple-list management capability. Works with or without a network connection.

Nexty

Price: Free

Description: PHP-based, so it installs locally and runs in your browser; supports contexts and reminders.

Nozbe

Price: Free

Description: Has markers for which action will be next and a time estimation for tasks. Contexts are visible and identifiable; easy to collect and process quickly; iPhone-ready.

SimpleGTD

Price: Free

Description: Tabs for next actions, contexts, projects, and done actions; drag-and-drop organization; easy undoing of tasks.

Task Writer

Price: Free

Description: Easy keyboard navigation, good use of calendaring for tasks, and a useful set of attributes for tasks, as well as the ability to auto-hide unneeded list views, help Task Writer to stand out a bit.

Toodledo

Price: Free

Description: Has a Firefox plug-in and a Google gadget for easy collection; also supports e-mail, voice mail, and traditional entry for collection. Includes a good overview of GTD in co-operation with its tools, as well. iPhone-optimized.

Tracks

Price: Free

Description: A Web server that runs locally or hosted through tracks.tra.in. Fast, lean, and pretty, it offers calendaring and a multi-user component. Currently at version 1.6.

Price: $5/month (premium)

Description: Is a wide-scale GTD system: collection, project management, recurring actions, and tickler files. Includes a mobile edition, iCal and RSS feeds, and e-mail and SMS reminders. An iPhone-specific version is available. A premium (paid) version also includes security encryption, collaboration, file attachments, and calendaring.

Other Browser/Web-based Task Managers

- Backpack

- Basecamp

- CoMindWork

- HiTask

- Hiveminder

- Joe's Goals

- Mojonote

- Remember the Milk

- Scrybe

- Sproutliner

- Task Freak!

- Tasks

- Tasktoy

- TeuxDeux

- Todoist

- Tweeto

- Zenlists

- ZenPages

GTD and Task Management Wikis

- D3

- GTDTiddlyWiki

- MonkeyGTD

- Pimki

iPhone Applications (not Web Apps)

- 2 Minute Timer

- 2Do

- Actions

- Checklist Wrangler

- Chores

- Dejumble

- DoBot ToDos

- EasyTask Manager

- Firetask

- Habits

- Life Balance

- Lists by MobilityWare

- Lists by Tynsoe.org

- Matalot by dPompa

- My Lists

- OmniFocus

- Outliner by CarbonFin

- Sciral Consistency

- Tanjas Checklist

- Tasks

- Things

- [ToDo by Appigo](#)

- [To Do by Erica Sadun](#)

- [To-Do List by Concrete Software](#)

- [To-Do Lists by Tapku](#)

- [ToodleDo](#)

Making the Most of What's Already on Your Mac

In last month's column, we looked at some of the software pre-installed on new Macs. It focused primarily on some of the organizational tools that are an integral part of Mac OS X. This month, I thought we could look at some of the features that control or enhance what you see and hear in Mac OS X. There is often third-party software available with similar or better features, but you may find that what's already there meets your needs.

What's Your Preference?

Prior to Mac OS X, I often found myself downloading and trying various system modification utilities to change the settings on my Mac. After a couple of bad experiences with modifications that were more trouble than they were worth, I have avoided most such "hacks" since moving to Mac OS X. That does not mean that there aren't some useful modifications to be made. Let's take a look at some of them.

If you don't like the colors that Mac OS X uses to highlight text or the overall look of various windows, your first stop should be the Appearance preference pane. Changing the highlight color, placement of scroll arrows, and behavior of the scroll bar is as simple as a few mouse clicks. There are not a huge number of customization options here, but it is one of the system settings I often forget about.

I was hesitant to say anything about the Desktop & Screensaver preference pane until I realized how many times I have been asked to recommend commercial software that does something already controlled by this pane. It has separate options for both desktop pictures and screensavers, each with its own tab of controls. If you are using multiple monitors with your Mac, each monitor will have a copy of the settings appear. This allows many of the settings to be different for each monitor.

From the Desktop tab, you can choose to have your Mac change desktop pictures after a specified period of time. New photos and backgrounds you have added to your Mac may already be in the list on the left—especially if you are using iPhoto or Aperture to organize your pictures.

The Screensaver tab in this preference pane presents different options for screensavers. This is one tab I don't explore much, since I usually just set the monitor to dim to black after a period of inactivity. The list of possible sources on the left side of this pane includes some such as "Word of the Day," which are specifically designed as screensavers. Photos in your iPhoto and Aperture libraries also appear in the list of potential screensavers. Selecting a

photo as a screensaver causes three small buttons to appear under the preview pane. These buttons control whether your photos are shown in slideshow, mosaic, or collage mode.

The Screensaver pane also presents some controls that apply to all screensavers. These options control the time until activation and whether the screensavers are presented in random order. It's also possible to activate the screensaver early by setting "hot corners."

What's on Display?

If you want to make changes to how your Mac's monitor displays information, chances are the controls are found in the the Displays preference pane. I've discussed most of the settings in this pane in a [previous column](#), and they haven't really changed since then, so I won't repeat myself. In this column, I'd like to focus a bit on the "Color" tab of that preference pane.

The Color tab of your Displays preference pane presents a series of color profiles that can be used to alter the way color is presented on your screen. The profiles available to you will vary slightly depending upon which Mac you are using and on whether any external monitors are attached. If you are looking at the Color tab and only see one color profile uncheck the "Show profiles for this monitor only" option. Your current monitor, identified by manufacturer or model number, is usually listed first. If you are using a Mac notebook, the profile is usually listed as "Color LCD."

Once the preference pane is showing several color profiles, switching among them is as simple as clicking the name to select the profile. The changes in color range from almost imperceptible to quite obvious depending upon how different the settings of the new profile are from your current one. It's important to choose a profile that's accurate for your display. That way the documents that you preview will look the same at the service bureau as they do on your Mac. Having a correct profile in the preference pane also enables you to use output profiles (e.g. in Photoshop) to preview how your images would look on a television.

The interesting thing about this tab is that you can create your own color profiles as needed. It's possible that the current profile you are using is not what's best for your lighting and working conditions. To create a new profile, choose the "Calibrate" option and follow the onscreen directions. In step one, I recommend choosing the Expert, mode since it gives you the opportunity to adjust a few settings that the standard options don't access. The directions are self-explanatory, but take your time. I can't guarantee good color results using this tool, but I can guarantee you won't get good results rushing through the steps. At the end of the process you will be given an opportunity to save your newly created profile. The general consensus among our editorial staff is that you will get much better results using some of the third-party calibration tools that are available, but this will give you sone idea of the possibilities. (You may be interested in our [calibration tutorial from 2007](#).)

An Extra Bit of Assistance

Although features in the Universal Access pane are generally targeted to Mac users with disabilities, non-disabled users may also find some of these features useful. The settings

are organized into four general areas of assistance, each with its own tab. The settings are pretty self-explanatory, but I'd like to mention a few options that seem to come up regularly as either very helpful or somewhat problematic.

VoiceOver is one feature located under the Seeing tab. It speaks descriptions of onscreen items and can be used to control the computer entirely from the keyboard. VoiceOver commands are entered by pressing and holding the Control and Option keys simultaneously, followed by a third key to initiate an action. Pressing and holding Control-Option-F for example, when VoiceOver is active, finds the next instance of the item in the search window. A quick start introduction to VoiceOver is run when you activate this feature. Give the tutorial a try. Make sure you go all the way through it, though; some of the latter screens explain how to access screen elements such as "spinners" from the keyboard and offer helpful tips on navigating Web pages.

The Seeing tab also contains a Display area, where users who need additional contrast to assist in reading the screen can control that. The primary choices are "Black on White," which is the default, and "White on Black," which produces an image that reminds me of a film negative. Periodically I encounter forum posts from someone who has accidentally generated this look and doesn't know how to fix it. The good news is that simultaneously pressing Command-Option-Control-8 will toggle the settings until you get the one you prefer. The contrast levels can also b adjusted using a slider on the same panel.

The Hearing tab contains a feature which I sometimes use in libraries and classrooms when I don't want to hear system sounds. The very first option allows one to set the screen so that the menu bar flashes whenever an alert sound would normally play. There's also an option here to play stereo sounds as mono. I don't use this often, but some users find it quite useful.

Take some time to look at the mouse and keyboard settings available in the Universal Access pane. You may find something useful. If you are working with Automator or AppleScript, you may be required to enable access for assistive devices in order for some commands to work properly. This option is activated by clicking a checkbox at the bottom of the Universal Access preference pane.

Bring on the Noise

At one point a few months ago, I had a horrible time switching among the various audio inputs and outputs connected to my MacBook Pro. Switching among a total of four microphones (internal built-in, USB headset, bluetooth headset, and one external) and three outputs (line out, USB headset, and Bluetooth headset) was very confusing. It seems as though no matter which option was selected I needed something different for what I was doing. I was constantly going to the Sound preference pane to make changes. Something had to be done.

At first I tried using a free program called LineIn to switch among the various inputs, since that is what I was doing most often. Before I could try SoundSource to switch both inputs

and outputs, someone pointed out an interesting feature of Mac OS X that lets you select among inputs and outputs without opening the Sound preference pane. Try this tip first, and then investigate the other two piece of software since they provide some additional features you may or may not want to add.

If you don't have the Mac OS X volume control set to appear in your menu bar already, open the Sound preference pane and check "Show volume in menu bar" before closing the preference pane. When the speaker icon appears in your menu bar, click it once to see what it looks like when opened. Now try holding down the Option key while selecting the speaker icon. This time a list of your audio inputs and outputs appears, with the currently selected options having a check by their names. Making a change is as simple as clicking on the new choice for input or output.

While we are on the subject of sound, why not have your Mac listen to you for a change? Out of the box your Mac can't do true speech-to-text conversion. You would need some additional software that's not free. You can, however, use software that's already on your Mac to let your voice tell your Mac what to do.

Final Thoughts

You may be wondering why I did an entire article that ends with a discussion of sound without once discussing either QuickTime 7 or the newer QuickTime X. Well, these programs are so integrated into the way your system handles audio and video that they're probably worth a separate article. That will be forthcoming as soon as I brush up on some of the editing tricks that are possible. I also avoided discussion of Spaces and Exposé for now. It has been a while since I used either of them, and I thought it worth taking the time to refresh my memory first. I've never been too sure I was making the most efficient use of those two features.

In the last two articles, I have basically focused on some of the core features of the OS. We haven't scratched the surface yet on the useful items in the Utilities folder, the iLife suite, and a ton of other things I am sure I have forgotten. When I first conceived of this series, I thought a few articles would wrap things up nicely, but the more thought I put into it the more I see what can be done. Stay tuned; there's more to come. Next month's column will look at QuickTime and some useful things you can do with it.

Desktop Pictures

Astronomy

We need new desktop pictures each month. Write to us!

This Month's Desktop Pictures

This month's desktop pictures feature planets, moons, galaxies, the International Space Station, and more. They were collected by NASA and selected by Michael Tsai.

View Pictures

Contributing Your Own Desktop Pictures

If you have a picture, whether a small series or just one fabulous or funny shot, please send it to editor@atpm.com and we'll consider publishing it in next month's issue.

Previous Months' Desktop Pictures

Pictures from previous months are listed in the desktop pictures archives.

Downloading All the Pictures at Once

Some browsers can download an entire set of desktop pictures at once.

Safari Create a workflow in Automator with these three actions:

1. Get Current Webpage from Safari.
2. Get Image URLs from Webpage. Get URLs of images linked from these webpages.
3. Download URLs.

iCab Use the Download command to "Download all linked files in same folder" and configure the limits to download only the linked images.

OmniWeb Choose "Save Linked ▷ Images. . ." from the File menu.

Placing Desktop Pictures

Mac OS X 10.3.x Through 10.6.x
Choose "System Preferences. . ." from the Apple menu, click the "Desktop & Screen Saver" button, then choose the Desktop tab. In the left-side menu, select the desktop pictures folder you want to use.

You can also use the pictures with Mac OS X's built-in screen saver. Select the Screen Saver tab which is also in the "Desktop & Screen Saver" System Preferences pane. If you put the ATPM pictures in your Pictures folder, click on the Pictures Folder in the list of screen savers. Otherwise, click Choose Folder to tell the screen saver which pictures to use.

Mac OS X 10.1.x and 10.2.x
Choose "System Preferences. . ." from the Apple menu and click the Desktop button. With the pop-up menu, select the desktop pictures folder you want to use.

You can also use the pictures with Mac OS X's built-in screen saver. Choose "System Preferences. . ." from the Apple menu. Click the Screen Saver (10.1.x) or Screen Effects (10.2.x) button. Then click on Custom Slide Show in the list of screen savers. If you put the ATPM pictures in your Pictures folder, you're all set. Otherwise, click Configure to tell the screen saver which pictures to use.

Mac OS X 10.0.x
Switch to the Finder. Choose "Preferences. . ." from the "Finder" menu. Click on the "Select Picture. . ." button on the right. In the Open Panel, select the desktop picture you want to use. The panel defaults to your `~/Library/Desktop Pictures` folder. Close the "Finder Preferences" window when you are done.
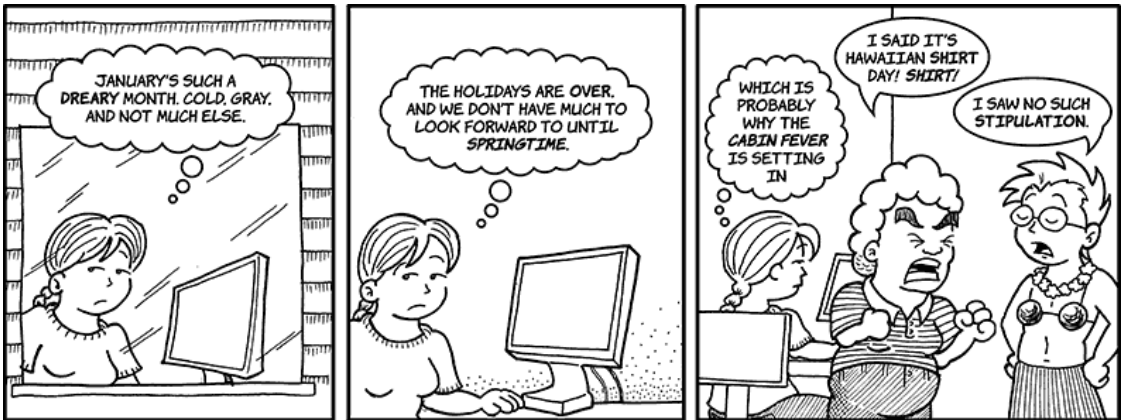
Insert Title Here

Cabin Fever

Someday

Eavesdropping

Editing Video

Rebranding

YMCA

People of the YMCA

NeatReceipts and NeatWorks

NeatReceipts

Function: Scanner for receipts, business cards, and other small material.
Developer: The Neat Company
Price: $200 (list); $150-$175 (Amazon)
Requirements: Intel processor, Mac OS X 10.5.8, available USB port.
Recommended: 3 GB of RAM.
Trial: None

NeatWorks 3.0.8

Function: Software for scanning, OCRing, and filing scanned PDFs.
Developer: The Neat Company
Price: $80; free (bundled with NeatReceipts or NeatDesk scanners)
Requirements: Intel processor, Mac OS X 10.5.8.
Recommended: 3 GB of RAM.
Trial: None

It was love at first sight.

At first, I thought it was too good to be true. I even said as much during the demo. The NeatReceipts scanner is about length of a sheet of paper, and about the height and width of two iPhones. And it's bus-powered, minimalist white with orange trim, and comes with a carrying case.

So I said to the lady at the Dulles Airport kiosk, "OK, hit me." She seduced me with these glorious demos showing beautiful OCR and built-in types for receipts and business cards.
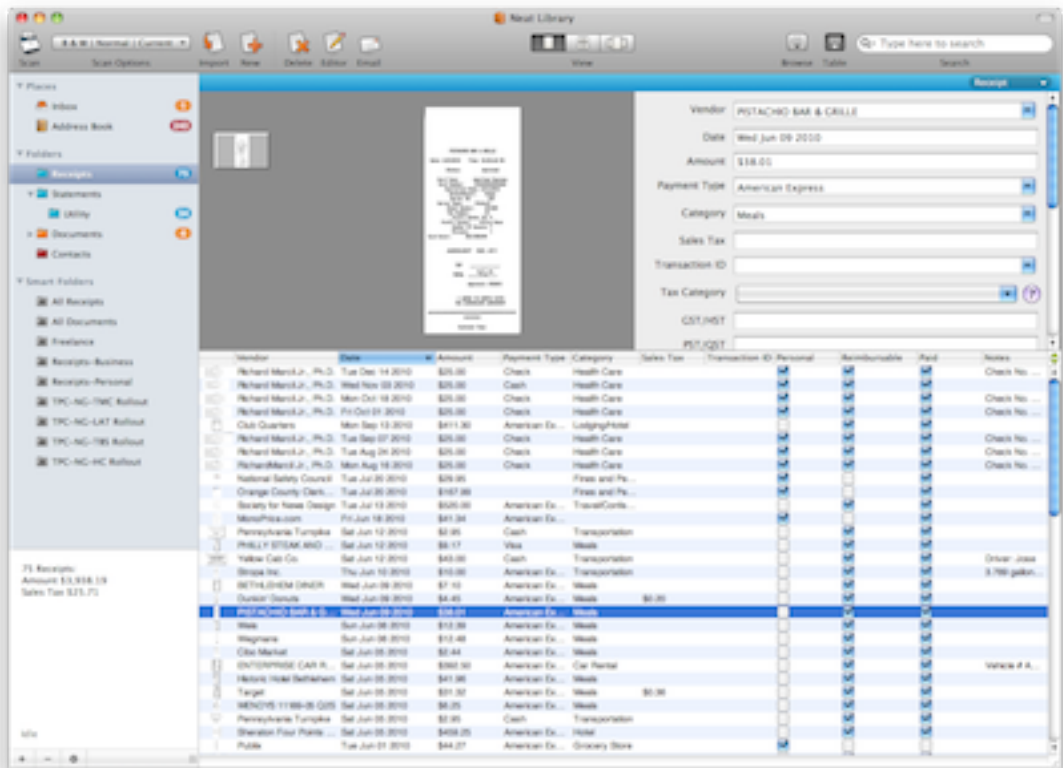
Little did I know what a tortured ride I was in for.

Here's the pitch with the NeatReceipts scanner: portable, USB bus–powered scanner capable of easily pulling down letters, newspaper clippings, business cards, and receipts; and software to OCR, file, and categorize them. The demo I got—no thanks to boredom at the aptly-named Dulles—showed it effortlessly translating receipts into expense reports and business cards into contacts, and with only a little more work, turning clipped-out recipes from *Cooking Light* and the *Washington Post* into computerized, searchable text.
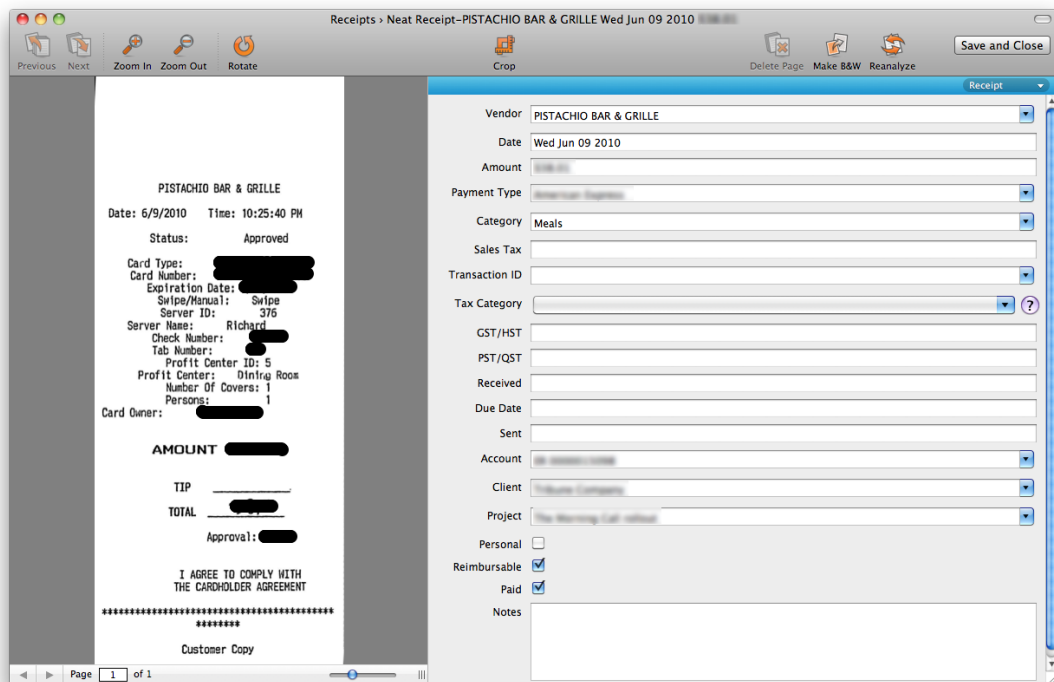
The pitch couldn't have come at a better time for me, when I was really making a push to trim down my paper-based filing system and digitize everything. I'm pretty compulsive about my files—more on that later—and the old color-coded, labeled files were starting to eat up space I needed to store newer, more salient information. I was lost, hopeless, in spite of my organizational utopia. The NeatReceipts promised a way out.

Maybe this glorious pipe dream works just great on a PC. The demo sure was Windows-based. But when I got my little bundle of joy in the mail, plugged it in, and started scanning in receipts, I discovered the fatal flaw. The software, a dreadful piece of bloated crapusculence known as NeatWorks, is absolutely, 100 percent horrible.

Here is the litany:

1. It is painfully, excruciatingly slow. I have used it on my 2 GHz Core 2 Duo MacBook and on my brand-new 3.4 GHz i5 iMac, and although it's borderline usable on the iMac, that's not good enough. I shouldn't be able to scan my receipts faster in *Photoshop* than in a piece of software whose principal job is OCRing text rather than high-fidelity photographic work.

2. The filing capabilities are surprisingly limited. It supports just three types of documents, each of which has its own set of supported metadata: Receipts, Documents and Business Cards. If something doesn't fit neatly into the Receipts category, like bank statements or electric bills, they have to go in Documents. . .and the metadata that is supported for documents is only slightly better than not having any metadata at all.

3. There's certainly no support for one of the things I file most: bills. I'm the kind of data-driven pack rat who keeps electric bills going back to when I first moved to Florida, in 2006, just to monitor my electric consumption over time. I refuse to get rid of old bills just because they're paid. You never know what you're going to need them for (and I have proof of that theory, in the form of a stolen-identity scare a few years ago). But NeatReceipts put almost the entire burden of filing bills and statements on the filename.

4. The OCR turns out not to be as useful as I expected, at least not for its primary application (receipts). I should give credit where credit's due and point out that that's not really NeatWorks' fault. I'd never really studied my receipts before, but I was now discovering that they vary hugely in format. NeatWorks can't guess what the total is, or even attempt to itemize, if the receipt breaks from convention.

5. Apparently the NeatWorks database, on the Mac, has an arbitrary limit of 999 files, thanks to crappy programming. After that, you're supposed to archive the database, I think. But I don't think it's that hard to support an arbitrarily large database. After all, Bare Bones has no such limit for Yojimbo, and ATPM editor extraordinaire Michael Tsai's EagleFiler has no limit either. What kind of ridiculous limit is 999?

6. Adding insult to injury, it's almost impossible to use the software after about 100 scans. It was borderline unusable on my MacBook, but taking the resources

up a notch to the i5 iMac, it went from "cannot use" all the way up to "go make cup of coffee while waiting." It reminded me of Photoshop 6 in OS X 10.1. . .and I don't mean that in a good way.

To be fair to NeatReceipts, the scanner itself really is great. It's swift, and because it's a sheetfed scanner rather than a flatbed, you can plow very quickly through, say, enough receipts for six weeks of company-paid travel.

I have digitized several boxes of files already using my NeatReceipts scanner, a task that would've been totally unbearable with a flatbed scanner, in a matter of relative swiftness, roughly two months working for several hours on occasional weekends. It's about as fast as my shredder, and the shredder I'm supposed to turn off after 10 minutes of continuous shredding. More on *how* I did that later, since I ditched NeatWorks about 100 pages in.

So I have a lot of positive things to say about the NeatReceipts scanner. . .as long as I'm not using NeatWorks, that is.

Positives: Quick scanning with good fidelity of text on documents with reasonable contrast (receipts, bills, account statements, business cards from relatively boring companies); sheet-fed scanner means you're not constantly positioning and cropping documents; buttons on front of device actually work with Mac OS X drivers. (You would be surprised how often that's not true!)

Negatives: Waste of money to to pay for bundled software; company support is mediocre; could really use some kind of click-sliding paper guide like ink-jet printers have to keep receipts and business cards scanning straight.

So all in all, I'm happy enough.

But I'll wager there are a lot of similar, maybe even less-expensive scanners that don't come bundled with crapware. For instance, the NeatReceipts scanner is actually a rebadged Plustek OpticSlim M12—or so I hear—and that's even less expensive. Because the scanner is TWAIN-compatible, you don't really need NeatWorks.

Now, do you remember I said that I'd given up on NeatWorks, but that I was still using my scanner to digitize my files? Here's a point of contention: everyone has a favorite file-database application. I ended up using DEVONthink Pro Office, which is excruciatingly expensive but has excellent and reasonably fast OCR support. Without getting into a full-scale review (maybe that's for next month) it could benefit from more extended metadata, especially adding custom metadata columns the way I did. I decided not to use EagleFiler or Yojimbo for this task because of the OCR question. And I like DEVONthink, in spite of the expense.

Now it's time to do some comparison shopping: You can find the OpticSlim M12 for about $120, and if you see the NeatReceipts for a similar price, it's not a bad deal. But I certainly wouldn't pay retail for it, because you'll spend at least $50 on software. If you don't mind spending more, the DEVONthink Office Pro bundle with the Fujitsu ScanSnap S1500 is probably the most bullet-proof solution.

So I think the moral of the story is, if you can get a good deal on the scanner, go ahead and get it. But be prepared to bring your own software.

Raptor-S16 iPhone Stand

Function: Semi-portable holder/stand for iPhones/iPods.
Developer: iLevel
Price: $29
Requirements: iPhone or iPod touch.
Trial: None

Desk stands and docks have been a popular accessory since shortly after the introduction of the iPod. I've looked at several different examples here, from an external battery model to a basic fold-up stand to a more traditional-looking metal stand (which, incidentally, I still use as my everyday "dock" for both my iPhone and iPod 5G). I've even reviewed a couple gooseneck-type stands: one that wasn't so great and one that was noticeably better but still not perfect.

iLevel's Raptor-S16 (so named for the length of the gooseneck) is most similar to that last one, the memorably named In Your Face, but is much larger and beefier. The Raptor sports a huge black clip, with padded jaws, to attach to almost any surface thinner than an inch. Think World's Toughest Chip Clip and you've got the right idea. The spring is stiffer than it needs to be, however, and really requires some hand strength to open past an inch. This probably isn't a great gift for your grandmother or your ten-year-old.
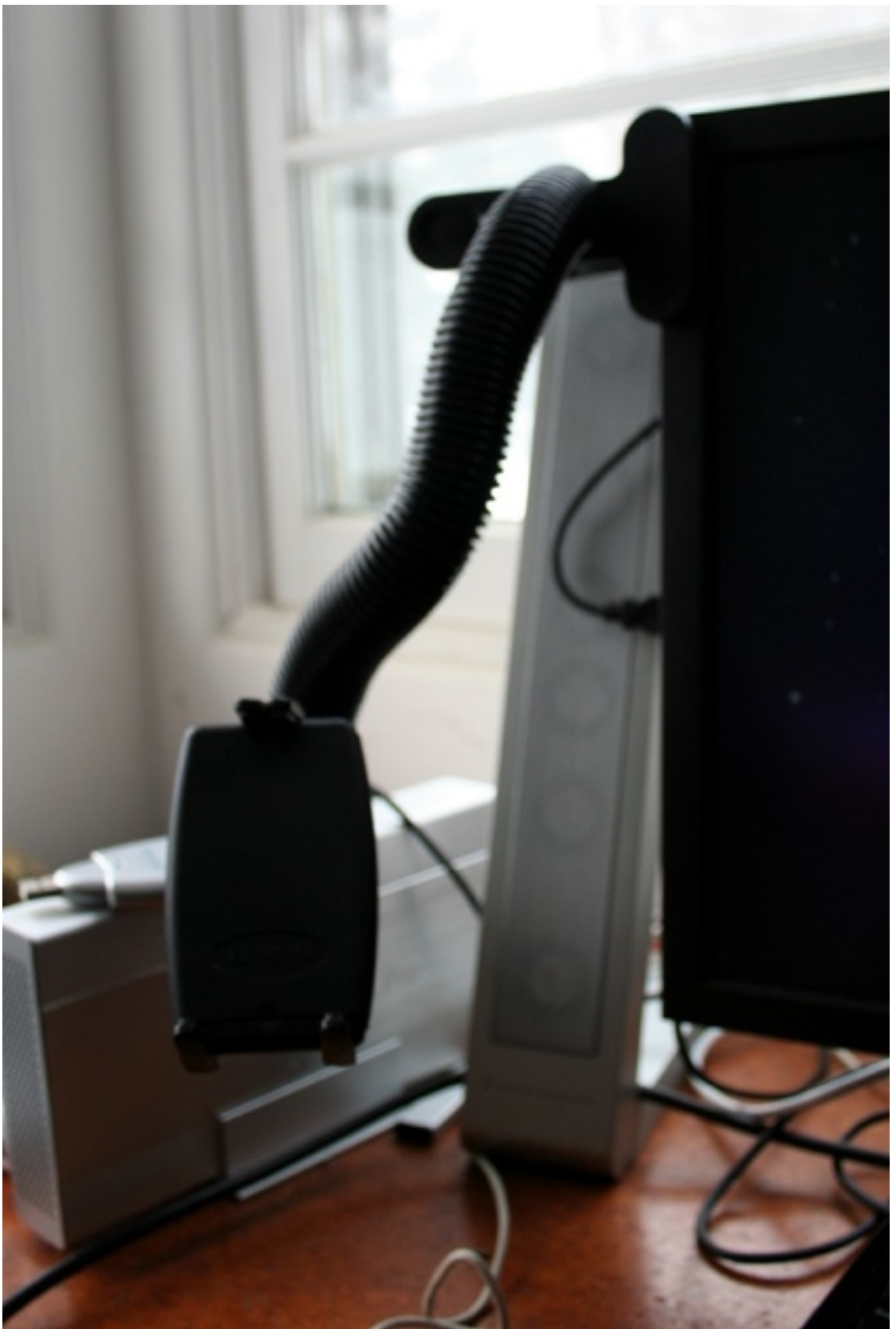
At the other end is a flat plate with four movable "fingers" on it. The bottom portion of the plate is on a spring-loaded slide, allowing the Raptor to hang onto any small electronic device up to about the height of an iPhone in a typical case (about 5″).

Between those two ends is about 16 inches of gooseneck. It's covered in flexible plastic tubing about one inch in diameter, but the gooseneck itself seems to be made of linked plastic "balls" much like those used in Joby's Gorillapod line. Suffice it to say that the Raptor's gooseneck seems very sturdy and reasonably stiff, although the downside of this is that adjusting the gooseneck makes a good deal of noise and takes some muscle. The added bulk of the Raptor also makes it less portable than similar stands—you won't be tossing this monstrosity in a laptop bag or your pocket without some advance planning or enormous pants. If space is a consideration, iLevel makes a version with an eight-inch gooseneck that is presumably somewhat more svelte.

My desk has a lip along the front edge, making it difficult to clip anything to the desk. It's just not an ideal setup for a product like this, something I had noticed with the In Your Face as well. However, the Raptor does a fine job on an airline tray table or on desks without that front lip, or on just about any other flat, stiff surface. I can actually clip it to the edge of my external monitor without interfering with the picture, thus dangling my phone off to the side out of the way. It's not exactly pretty, but it works fairly well.

Another complaint I had about the In Your Face was the stiffness of the spring used in the device clamp. The Raptor's spring tension is noticeably lower and seems to be just about perfect, though it does require two hands to insert or remove an iPhone in the clamp.

At $29, iLevel's Raptor is priced pretty much right where the competition is. (OK, a dollar cheaper, but who's counting?) It seems better-built and more carefully thought out than the other two similar products I've seen, however, and it's my favorite of the three so far.

FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions

What Is *ATPM*?

About This Particular Macintosh (ATPM) is, among other things, a monthly Internet magazine or "e-zine." ATPM was created to celebrate the personal computing experience. For us this means the most personal of all personal computers—the Apple Macintosh. About This Particular Macintosh is intended to be about your Macintosh, our Macintoshes, and the creative, personal ideas and experiences of everyone who uses a Mac. We hope that we will continue to be faithful to our mission.

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ATPM is looking to add more regular reviewers to our staff. Though all positions with *About This Particular Macintosh* are volunteer, reviewing is a great way to share your product knowledge and experience with fellow members of the Macintosh community. If you're interested, contact ATPM's Reviews Editor, Paul Fatula.

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- The **Print PDF** edition is saved in Adobe PDF format. It has a two-column layout with smaller text and higher-resolution graphics that are optimized for printing. It may be viewed online in a browser, or downloaded and viewed in Apple's Preview or Adobe Reader on Macintosh or Windows. PDFs may be magnified to any size and searched with ease.

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Segments: Slices from the Macintosh Life

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What If My Question Isn't Answered Above?

We hope by now that you've found what you're looking for (We can't imagine there's something else about ATPM that you'd like to know.). But just in case you've read this far (We appreciate your tenacity.) and still haven't found that little piece of information about ATPM that you came here to find, please feel free to e-mail us at (You guessed it.) editor@atpm.com.